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ABSTRACT

The structure and function of the California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC), a collaborative action research organization designed to link research to educational practice, is described in this paper. A brief history of school-university partnerships and a review of the status of these partnerships is provided, followed by a description of the CERC research cycle, which is based on purposeful agenda setting, and of the CERC governance structure, which is based on a participative decision making forum. Based on the success of CERC so far, it is concluded that factors for success of school-university partnerships, should include: (1) shared professional resources and services; (2) relevant research programs with practical significance; (3) professional collegiality and training; (4) school improvement objectives; (5) quarterly reports and assessments; and (6) public support. Five figures present information on CERC financial and organizational aspects and on school-university partnership characteristics. (21 references) (LMI)

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University-Local District Partnerships:

The Case of the California Educational Research Cooperative

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UNIVERSITY-LOCAL DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS: THE CASE OF THE CALIFORNIA EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH COOPERATIVE

OVERVIEW

One of the principal legacies of the Reagan administration is a dramatic reduction in federal involvement in public education. Although financial support for school programs has been cut by more than 50 percent, the reversal of commitment is ever sharper. Where previous administrations pursued expansive federal regulatory authority and raised public consciousness by making education a cabinet-level department, the Reagan years encouraged local initiative, state-level program development, and eliminated the National Institute of Education as a semi-autonomous research and development agency. Funds for the federal system of regional educational research and development laboratories has been cut sharply, as has the support for university-based research programs and centers funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Despite George Bush's declared intent to be an "education President," resources for substantial new programs are not likely to survive Gramm-Rudman limitations and the need for Savings & Loan bailout money. Prospects for a reversal of this trend are exceedingly dim especially for the educational researcher. These developments have meant and will continue to mean a sharp reduction in federally-supported research activities.

Moreover, the willingness of state and local educators to believe that university-based research can or should play a major role in school programs and policy development continues to decline. As a result, educational

researchers now face resource and legitimacy problems.

Over the past several years a number of significant new research and development organizations have been created for the express purpose of addressing these issues. Collaborative action research organizations have been revived. The California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC) is one such organization. CERC is a research, development, and training organization designed to link social science research to the solution of a broad range of policy and practice problems confronting school systems. It is funded by average daily attendance (ADA) contributions from 21 local school districts, two county offices of education, and opportunity funds from the Chancellor of the University of California, Riverside. The uniqueness of CERC's structure and function is set forth in this paper together with a brief history of school-university partnerships and a review of the status of these partnerships.

HISTORY OF PARTNERSHIPS

The earliest and best known effort at school-university collaboration was initiated in the late nineteenth century by a committee under the chairmanship of Charles Eliot, president of Harvard. This committee, known as "the committee of ten", issued its recommendations in 1892 and included among them a call for:

> a conference of school and college teachers of each principal subject which enters into programs of secondary schools. . .to consider the limits of its subject, the best methods of instruction, the most desirable allocation of time for the subject, and the best methods of testing the pupils attainment therein. (Cohen, 1974, p. 1931)

The outgrowths of these early efforts included the development of the College Entrance Examination Board and the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (Fuess, 1950). However, the working relationship extended beyond determining course work and instructional materials to prescribing what was good for the schools because of the superior expertise on the part of the college personnel. This led to direct conflict with the schools.

By 1930, the Progressive Education Association was formed to find means by which teachers in schools and professors in colleges could work together in an environment which fostered mutual respect, confidence and collaboration until the late 1940's.

World War II fostered several factors which enhanced school-university partnerships. The end of the war produced a large number of GI Bill-supported graduate students who were utilized by the colleges and universities to complete even more surveys and field studies than had been

possible during the preceding decades. At the same, the "baby boom" produced a rapid expansion of the public schools. This increased the need for the kinds of services the university survey teams could provide. The boom expanded the need for cooperation in the preparation of teachers. Previous efforts to train teachers in campus-laboratory schools were being criticized as unrealistic and overcrowded.

Noted sociologist Kurt Lewin was troubled by society's growing awareness after WW II of significant social problems, including the rights of the individual, prejudice, bureaucracy and industrialization. He held firm to the belief that

> Socially, it does not suffice that university organizations produce scientific insights...Practitioners had to understand that only through use of the social sciences could they "hope to gain the power necessary to do a good job". (Lewin, 1948, p. 206 & 213)

He coined the term "Action Research" to characterize this approach of linking university research activities with social problem resolution. The term describes research which unites the experimental approach to social science with programs of social action which addressed major social issues, i.e., the application of tools and methods of social science to immediate, practical problems. The goals of "Action Research" were contributing to theory and knowledge in the field of education and improving practice in the schools (Smulyan, 1983). The elements of collaborative action research, suggesting that each group be represented in the process, shares in the planning, implementation, and analysis of the research and that each contributes different expertise and a unique perspective to the process (Hord, 1981),

became the basis for numerous and subsequent school-university partnerships. These partnerships successfully relieved the tension between educational practitioners and university faculty developed in the 1930's.

Maeroff (1983), reviewing the history of school-university collaboration noted:

> After Sputnik (1957) togetherness flourished...new curricula in biology, physics, English, and mathematics were prepared. Schools and colleges, cooperatively, pushed for excellence in education.The relationship was at times unhealthy. Colleges would often take schools for granted. In paternalistic fashion, curricula would be packaged and teacher training programs planned with little or no consultation with the school (p. 2).

He reports that collaboration "came to a screeching halt" during the 1960's, but cooperative efforts such as Goodlad's League of Cooperating Schools, the Association for Student Teaching, and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education were building strong networks between schools and universities. At the same time, Ann Lieberman was revitalizing the Metropolitan School Study Council at Teachers College, Columbia University, as one of the most successful school-university partnerships (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1988).

The most recent survey of school-university/college partnerships was published by Wilbur, et.al., in 1987 for the American Association of Higher Education. They identify and categorize over 1,042 school-university and college partnerships. A summary of participants and activities shown in Figure 1 reveals that partnerships are organized around a common theme by people with a shared need or vision. School-university partnerships are given different names depending on the structure and function of their

activities, i.e., adopt-a-school programs, research consortia, academic academies, and institutes, etc. The National Writing Project is organized for the specific purpose of professional growth and training of teachers in the area of writing. Likewise, numerous partnerships provide direct services to minority, gifted, "at-risk" and college-bound students. Curriculum and policy development Academies, Institutes and Consortia sponsor partnership activities for teachers and administrators. Adopt-a-School programs link business with public school officials to enhance and enrich students, curricula, extra-mural activities. They seek the "best" practice. Mutual benefit is a sustaining variable as is the actual ability to change practice. Partnerships capitalize on the collective expertise of teachers, administrators and business professionals in behalf of improved educational practices for students.

Figure 1: School-University Partnerships Major Activities and Participants

PARTICIPANTS

ACTIVITIES	Students	Teachers	Administrators	Business
Professional Growth/ Training	Articulation • Tutoring • College Bound Programs	Pre-service New Teacher Support • Curriculum Development • National Writing Project	Institutes & Academies • Consortia	Institutes & Academies • Consortia
Policy Development	Adopt-a-School	Articulation • Adopt-a-School • Consortia • Institutes & Academies	Articulation • Adopt-a-School • Consortia • Institutes & Academies	Adopt-a-School • Consortia • Institutes & Academies
Special Need	Minority Disadvantaged At-Risk • Gifted and Talented • Consortia	Consortia	Consortia	
Research	Consortia	Teaching & Learning • Institutes & Academies	Consortia • Institutes & Academies	Consortia • Institutes & Academies

CERC STRUCTURE

Organization

Mission and Purpose

Although professors of education have frequently served as consultants and conducted research in the schools, few arrangements have organizationally linked schools of education, *qua* institutions, to achieve shared purposes. Representing over 400,000 students in 21 local school districts and two county offices of education, the California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC) is uniquely organized to link local school systems with the University of California, Riverside. CERC serves as a research and development center for sponsoring county offices of education and cooperating districts--combining the professional experience and practical wisdom of practicing professionals with the theoretical interest and research talents of the UCR School of Education faculty. Founded as a teaching laboratory for graduate students and a support service for school decision makers, it is not unlike teaching labs found in the physical sciences where research activities help to solve problems, develop strategies, plan and evaluate.

Pooling fiscal and personnel resources to support improved educational planning and decision making for the mutual benefit of all members is the primary purpose of CERC. Participation in CERC provides member districts and sponsoring county offices of education access to research, planning and evaluation resources far superior to those any individual school system could create. Members reap mutual benefits through collaboration with other

professional educators and involvement in the solution of pressing school-improvement problems. Working together, school system leaders and university scientists undertake cooperative research, evaluation, and planning activities that are both high in quality and of immediate practical value.

Goals

The goals of the Cooperative were established after extended consultation with local school system superintendents who recognized the need for affiliation and collaboration in the identification and solution to pressing school-improvement problems. Together with a substantial fiscal commitment from the Chancellor, the California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC) was established as a long-term, learn-as-we-go alliance to pursue six broad goals:

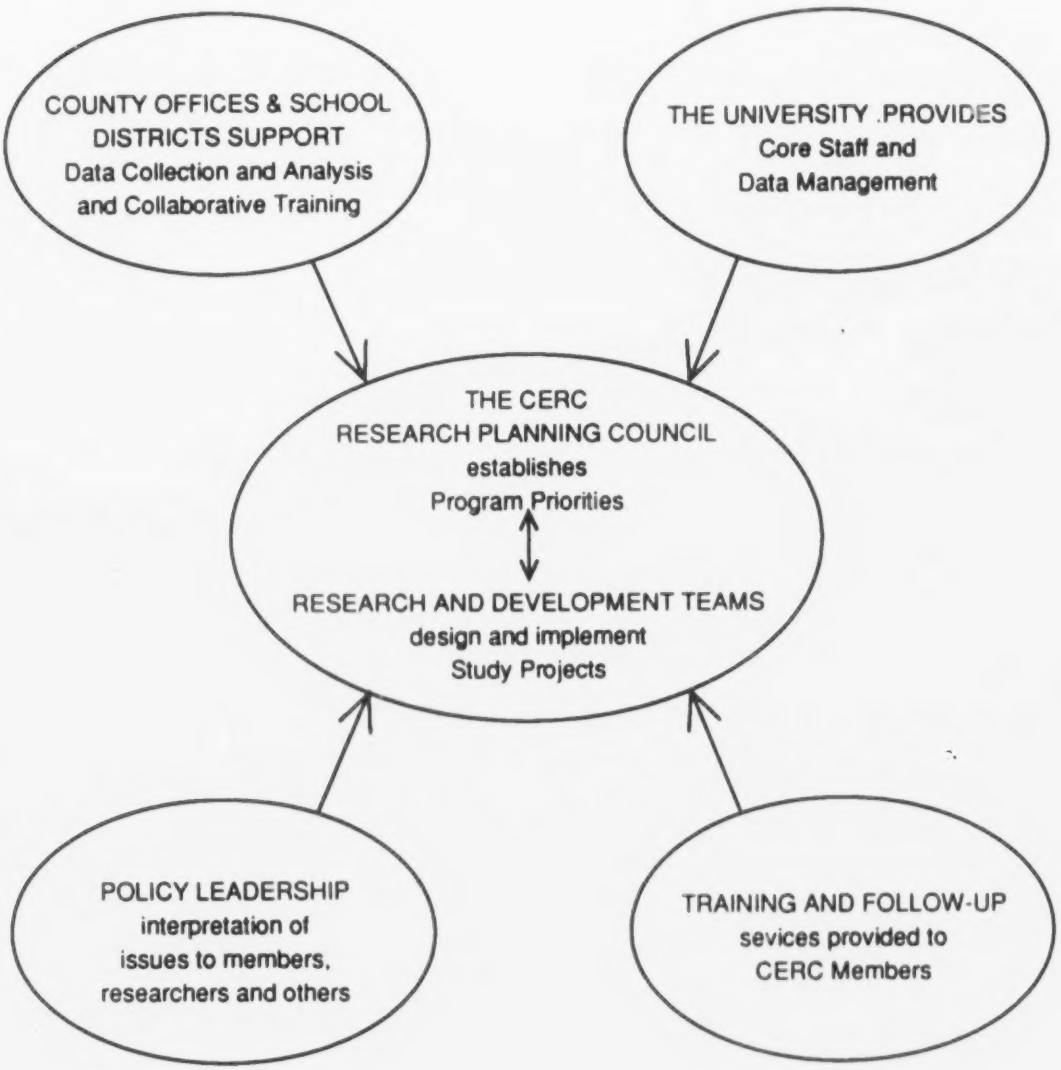
- o Tangible practical support for school improvement,
- o Proven strategies for resolving instruction, management, policy, and planning issues facing public education,
- o Valuable professional development opportunities for current and future school leaders,
- o Support for data-based decision making among school leaders,
- o Research, planning and evaluation activities that are meaningfully interpreted and applied to school-district problems, and
- o Data and analysis to assist in generating public support for effective school programs.

These goals are pursued on a regular basis through quarterly meetings of a unique agenda setting and policy structure called the Research Planning Council.

Governance

CERC is organized around a governance structure, the Research Planning Council (RPC), a vehicle for shared decision making.

Figure 2: CERC Organization



The RPC provides a cooperative forum for systematic study and joint action to resolve pressing problems facing school leaders. It currently has 30 members--one representative from each county office of education sponsor and cooperating school district and seven members of the University faculty. Through membership on the Research Planning Council, Cooperative partners share in the identification of research problems and the development of research strategies. In addition to establishing CERC research priorities, the Research Planning Council oversees the dissemination of research findings and the establishment of training and technical assistance activities. The CERC Director chairs the Research Planning Council and is responsible for turning its adopted priorities into an action research program.

The school-system participants are superintendents or their designees who have made a financial commitment of $1.00 per Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for local school districts or $30,000 each for sponsoring county offices of education over a continuous three-year period. Membership entitles each Cooperative partner a seat on the Research Planning Council (RPC).

The University members of the Research Planning Council include the Dean of the School of Education, the Director appointed by the Dean, the CERC Manager, and four faculty members selected by the Dean for their interests in research, training and public service. The Research Planning Council meets quarterly to set the work agenda of the Cooperative and establish research priorities, review research designs, receive literature review information, develop plans for the dissemination of research reports

and other CERC publications and review the overall effectiveness of CERC research and programs.

The work agenda is designed to create a balance between research significance, school-district need, and student learning. Thus far, seven research projects have been selected for intense study. These include:

- o Effects of Changing Class Size on Students and Classrooms
- o Costs and Effects of Year-Round Education
- o Student Promotion and Retention
- o Organizing for the Opening of New Schools
- o School Dropouts/High-Risk Students
- o Restructuring of Public Schools

The Research Planning Council (RPC) receives quarterly progress reports on the status of each CERC research project as the research study moves through the stages of the CERC Research Cycle (see Figure 5 below). The Council members then engage in pertinent discussions of the projects. They advise Research teams of issues needing clarification, provide mid-course correction course when needed, share in the research decision-making process and discuss strategies for the implementation of research findings.

Staff

CERC's staffing is unique. Cooperative activities are designated in a purposeful way with personnel representing the cooperative model--a blend

of university and public school expertise. Its activities are of two types: (1) research, evaluation, development and training programs and (2) operations, dissemination and technical assistance services.

The CERC Director, a University faculty member, has overall responsibility for CERC activities. The Director convenes and chairs the Research Planning Council. By incorporating RPC priorities and concerns into the design and execution of research and development activities, he links faculty research priorities and interests with those of Cooperative members. He retains overall intellectual authority for the research, evaluation, development and training programs of the Cooperative.

Management of the Cooperative rests with the CERC Manager, a trained specialist in public school management, appointed by the Director to a full-time position. The Manager works closely with the Director in member and agency contacts, selection of personnel, budget operations, production of quarterly newsletters, annual reports, development of dissemination strategies with members, and implementation of CERC Special Service Agreements.

Each CERC research project is directed by a Project Investigator (PI)--a University research scholar compensated through summer salary or consultant service fees. At present, all of the CERC projects are directed by PIs drawn from the UCR School of Education faculty. From time to time, it is anticipated that investigators will be drawn from other campuses when needed interest or expertise is not available among the resident faculty.

In addition to the CERC Manager and Principal Investigators, the budget

supports six Research Fellowships. Research Fellows are graduate students enrolled in a doctoral program in education and appointed by the Dean of the School of Education. They are assigned to work with Project Investigators as the primary research staff for each project research team. The base budget also supports a full-time secretary and an administrative assistant.

Special Services Staff include itinerant research associates funded through Special Services Agreements. CERC Special Services Agreements allow agencies such as the California State Department of Education, member districts, and county offices access to special research projects designed specifically to study issues of special interest.

Financial Support

1989-90 Income

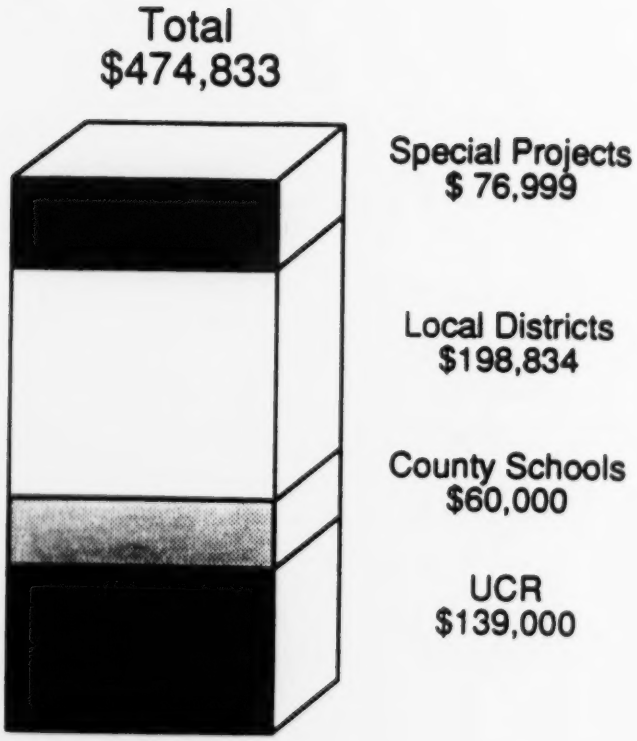
The annual base budget for the California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC) is derived from three sources:

1. UCR Chancellor's Opportunity Funds,
2. $1.00 per Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for membership dues from each of its 21 school- district members, and
3. $30,000 from each county office of education.

CERC Special Services agreements provide a source of ancillary funding. Funding from Special Services Agreements varies depending on the type of research or consultation requested by CERC's members. These agreements allow member districts and county offices of education to take advantage of

their relationship with the University by drawing on the expertise of its faculty to help resolve special problems. Figure 3 graphically illustrates proportional contributions to CERC from each of the four income sources.

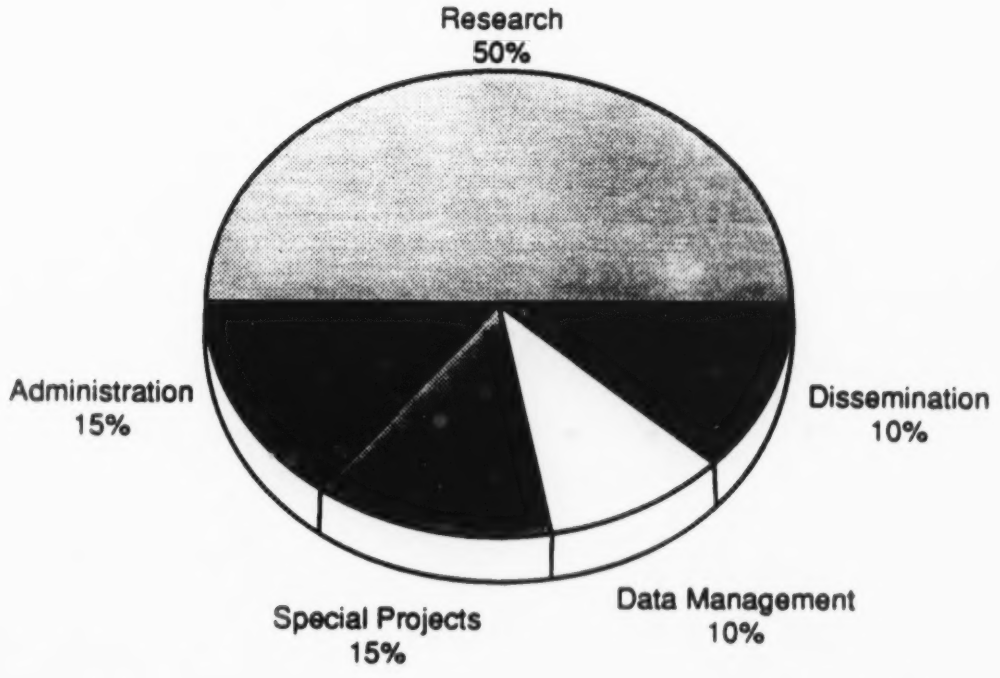
Figure 3: 1989-1990 CERC Income



1989-90 Expenditure Summary

CERC expenditures are depicted in Figure 4 as the percentage of time spent by staff in the conduct of CERC activities. The major activities of the Cooperative are research, administration, dissemination, data management and special projects.

Figure 4: 1989-90 Expenditure Summary



Financial Summary by Function

CERC FUNCTIONS

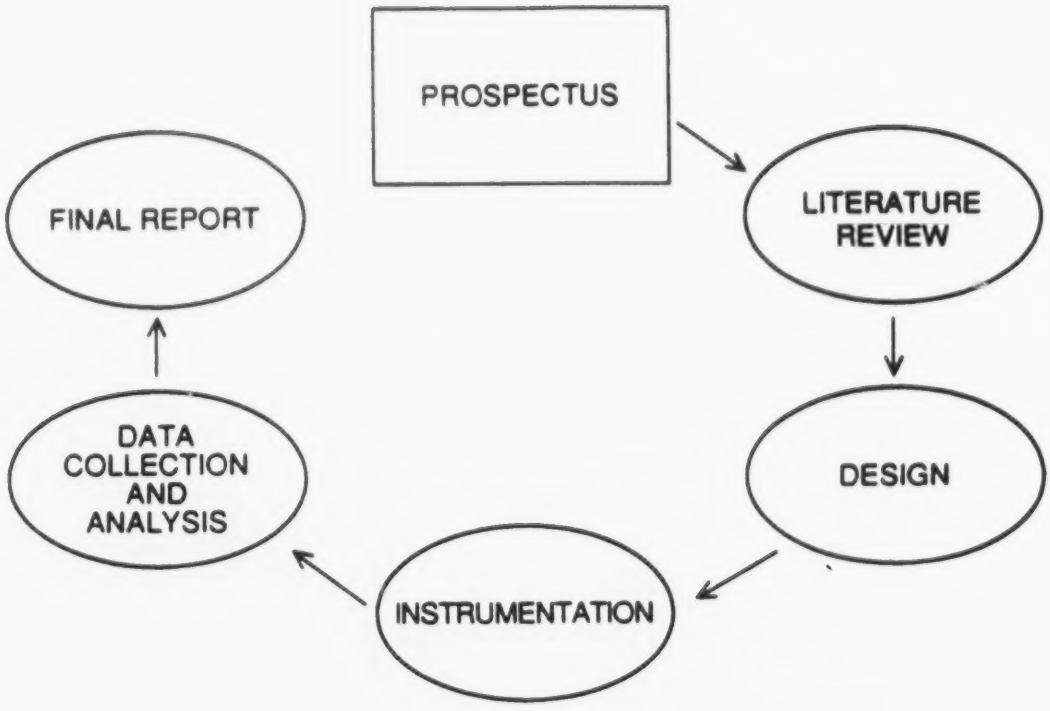
Programs and Services

Research Cycle

Good research ideas come from many different sources--classroom teachers, school administrators, board members, university faculty and graduate students. The Council reviews new concept papers twice a year as part of its fall and spring agendas. The first step in bringing a good idea to the attention of the Cooperative is to formulate the problem clearly and describe how it can be studied productively. This is accomplished through the development of a brief research prospectus prepared by CERC staff for discussion by the Research Planning Council (RPC). Once a project is selected for study, a research team is appointed.

The team is composed of a research scholar named Principal Investigator and a CERC Research Fellow. They undertake a review of previous research on the issue and develop a formal research design. The research design is then brought to the Research Planning Council for review and a literature review document is prepared for publication. Once the design is approved, instrumentation, data collection and analysis take place. Each research project progresses on a critical timeline. Quarterly progress reports are made to the Council. Projects culminate in a final report presented to the Research Planning Council. The CERC Research Cycle is illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: CERC Research Cycle



The final report initiates the CERC Dissemination Process described by Figure 6 (discussed below in the Dissemination Model section). Involvement of Cooperative members throughout the process assures that research activities address member interest. This is a critical element of CERC's success as a school-university partnership.

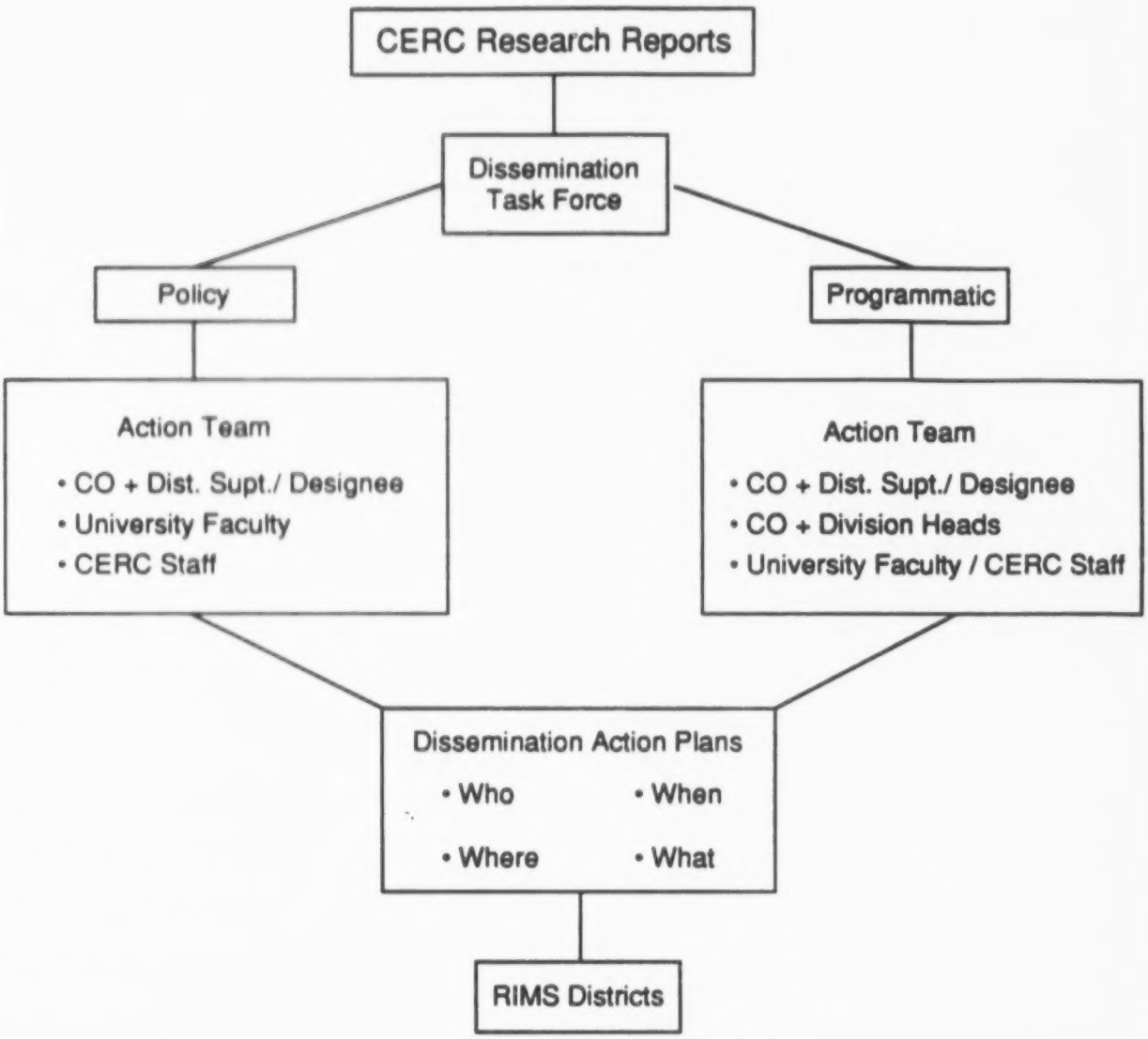
Dissemination Model

Linking research findings to school programs and policy changes is critical to the Cooperative's success. CERC activities are all directed toward pursuing the research goals of the cooperative members and faculty investigators. Pursuit of these goals is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for school program improvement. Until research results are incorporated into school operations, no real change will occur. For this reason, CERC's Research Planning Council has appointed a Dissemination Task Force.

Dissemination Task Force members represent each segment of the Council, i.e., county offices of education, large and small school districts and University faculty. Its chairman, elected by Task Force members, is a CERC superintendent with direction from the Council to develop a dissemination plan by which research results presented at quarterly Council meetings are turned into practical strategies for the field. To accomplish this plan, the Task Force has established Policy and Programmatic "Action Teams." After the completion of a CERC Research Report, the "Action Teams" work through county office of education designees and their staffs to develop

implementation plans and strategies for the dissemination of CERC research results to the appropriate audiences, i.e., teachers, administrators, legislatures. "Action Teams" are currently at work developing inservice awareness sessions and training staff based on results and intervention strategies set forth in the latest CERC publication *Retention in Grade: A Failed Policy.* Figure 6, the CERC Dissemination Model graphically illustrates this process.

Figure 6: CERC Dissemination Model



Publications

CERC has an active publications program. Within a 12-month period over 5,000 CERC publications have been requested and distributed to national, state, and local educators, board members, legislators, etc. Several reports have been submitted to professional research and policy journals for publication; others have served as a basis for policy briefs distributed to university scholars and professional educators.

CERC members receive ten copies of each research report upon request, quarterly Newsletters and an Annual Report describing the year's activities. Newsletters and Annual Reports are distributed to board members and administrative staffs and are mailed to over 500 national, state and local policy makers, scholars, and the general public, thus keeping them informed of CERC's activities on a regular basis. Newsletters include research progress updates and publications abstracts written by CERC Research Fellows. All technical reports are listed in ERIC.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Why is CERC successful?

Several elements contribute to CERC's success. Organizationally, CERC is built around a governance structure, the Research Planning Council (RPC), a forum for shared decision making. RPC members hold a strong philosophical orientation regarding research--it must meet two criteria. CERC research must have practical significance in the field and be recognized by

University faculty as legitimate cutting-edge research. The members are dedicated to the process of renewal rather than a quick-fix philosophy.

The superintendents' active interest, financial commitment and mutual belief in the improvement of educational practice through data-based decision making have been critical elements to CERC success. The University's firm commitment of facilities and finances provided the mortar to cement CERC's foundation.

Agenda setting is purposeful and deliberate. The CERC Research Cycle avoids staff scurrying around on short term opportunistic projects and facilitates a research agenda-setting process that clarifies priorities and looks carefully for new ways to solve old, but continuing problems. The willingness to entertain a variety of topics from curriculum development to issues involving policy reform such as class size, retention, year-round education, educational restructuring, effective teaching methods, and authentic assessment provides an atmosphere conducive to open discussion.

The ultimate challenge to CERC is the same as to any symbiotic relationship. The relationship is inherently fragile and calls upon each party to spend considerable energy attracting and holding an appropriate partner long enough to produce the desired effects. As long as the energy of CERC's members focus on:

1. Sharing professional resources few public schools can match,

2. Access to products and services covering a full range of research, evaluation and development issues,

3. A research and evaluation program designed to address directly the concerns of its members,

4. A professional forum for the exchange of information on instructional program improvement, organizational structure development, policy implementation and institutional planning,

5. Membership on the Research Planning Council,

6. Access to a comprehensive date base and to University faculty members with recognized expertise on a broad range of educational issues,

7. A school-improvement partnership,

8. Clinical training for current and future school leaders,

9. Quarterly research, evaluation and planning reports, policy and program assessment briefs, and

10. Assistance in the development of a broad-based coalition of public support for program and policy improvement.

the delicate balance of its symbiotic relationship will be achieved, and CERC will survive the test of time.

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